

“Décroissance” and Anarchy

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The concept of «décroissance» has lately become fashionable, even among anarchists, with the recent publication of a brochure in the FA on the topic. It is being discussed at length by many. What I want to emphasize today, is not the necessity to practice «décroissance», but how to effectively put it into practice, in our everyday lives. Too often I heard people say that the answer is easy: we should consume less. Some even go as far as praising poverty and self-restraint. But that is not all, and if we linger on this idea, we won't understand the whole notion of «décroissance».

As a matter of fact, is it really necessary to go back to the days when human beings lived in caves? Is that what «décroissance» is all about? On the contrary, most people wish to lead a relatively comfortable life, and who can blame them? Consuming less will not solve anything: what is the use of buying just one pair of shoes, if the pair of shoes was made by children at the other end of the world, and if we buy it in a supermarket? That surely is no «décroissance»... There is, behind the concept, an economic and political system. The real problem is capitalism ! Thus, questioning consumption without questioning production: where are things produced? by whom? how? in what conditions? – means we do not question the capitalist operating mode (production–distribution–consumption). Even more so, we accept the necessity – or fatality – behind it...

The noxious perversity of this system is that it has established constraints that ensure its own survival: the idea is to create acts of mass consumption, as well as the apparent need to satisfy them in order to live decently. And consumption itself, even if it is very little, is the best guarantee that the system will survive. Indeed, although we curse and plague the Medef (the bosses' union in France) and those in power, nothing will change if we do not get involved in the effective alteration of this system. Not only do we not question it, but we allow it to regenerate itself by supporting it ! Shall we find the strength to stop buying from Auchan or Carrefour supermarkets, McDonald's, Elf, Total, Nike, Microsoft etc.? So, what shall we do? The idea is that people themselves should decide on what they want to produce, how they want to produce it, and also why, and for whom, where, etc. Locally, they decide on what lifestyle they want: they are open-eyed and active actors of their mode of own lives. This organization is much less energy wasting; an end to super production. There would be less transportation of goods, more collective discussions on the production modes – which would pollute less.

We must therefore go further: we should think of the anarchist organization mode as the only way to “décroître” harmoniously, once we are rid of the capitalist monster! We should also defend

the idea that the libertarian society is healthy ecologically, realistic economically, fair and equal socially, and is inscribed within the humanist frame of “décroissance”.

So the point is not to stop consuming, but rather to produce and consume better. In order to frighten the capitalist system, we should be able to give ourselves the means – in spite of the obstacles– to get a libertarian society working; let’s take our responsibilities! Let me insist: the anarchist society project is coherent and attainable! Let’s create, invent and get involved in local alternative networks of production and distribution, which smack of “décroissance”. We want to define together what we want to consume and how to produce this according to our principles and ecological constraints. Let’s use the tools and production means to make them fit people’s needs wherever they live. And let’s not take “But there is no such thing in my town as an autonomous and self-catering network now” for an answer. For giving 1€ to alternative systems and giving 1€ to the capitalists do not have the same political value: we vote everyday by consuming!

In France, for example, there are associations of small farmers and nearby consumers, like AMAP (Association for the maintenance of peasant agriculture). Together they decide beforehand on what and how they will produce and distribute; meanwhile the consumers make a promise to buy the production, thus enabling the farmers to free themselves from the policies that ensnare and stifle them. The benefits are twofold: first, it enables the small farmers to survive, even though the capital has programmed to destroy them; secondly, it greatly reduces the waste of energy and food which is the usual side-effect of industrial –and chemical– production, of transport and storage. So the system is directly attacked where it hurts most! No more intermediaries, just people self-organizing... And this type of initiatives can be conceived and created for all sorts of productions. These examples of alternatives can become a real answer, completely anti-capitalist, ecological and realistic. Yet if we do not get involved in such initiatives, there is a risk they will be absorbed by the system. Indeed, these AMAP are based on nearly libertarian principles, but are in the hand of the association Alliance PEC – which does not particularly like libertarians. If we are not careful, these initiatives could very well become the new fashion for bourgeois to feel ‘closer to the people’... It is the same with SEL (System of local exchange) and any other sort of local alternative. So the thing is, to not only stop buying stuff from chain stores and big producers, but also to put into practice, as soon as possible and as much as possible, a positive and efficient organization of society. Let’s help to the implement of an anarchist organization of society by creating and supporting local alternative networks of production and distribution, of recycling and exchange, as well as friendly meeting places, like libraries, squats, self-managed kitchens, free services, lessons etc.

What is very interesting is that these networks attract a lot of people who are not militants: anarchy is too beautiful for people not to be seduced! It is our role as anarchists to show that, through practice, a libertarian society is attainable and sustainable (!!!). This libertarian society is the only means to achieve both individual and collective comfort, and “décroissance”. The more we act, the more coherent we get!

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